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When Does Juvenile Delinquency Lead to Serious Crime?

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System
in cooperation with the American Orthopsychiatric Association

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When Does Juvenile Delinquency Lead to Serious Crime?

MR. KEATH: When does juvenile delinquency lead to serious crime?

JUDGE BRAUDE: As a judge who sees the problem of crime and delinquency from his vantage point on the bench, I would be inclined to say that juvenile delinquency leads to serious crime when the delinquent is not properly handled on his first court appearance.

DR. RABINOVITCH: I would say that failure to gain insight into the delinquent child's individual needs and to meet these needs before or soon after the problem of behavior arises, and treating the child in difficulty with aggression tends to perpetuate and to aggravate patterns of delinquency.

DR. ESCALONA: To the psychologist, the question as put is confusing. A delinquent act which may be minor from a legal point of view may be indicative of serious psychological disturbance, and the reverse may also occur. In speaking of serious crime we must know whether you mean serious to the child or to the community.

Results of Poor Handling

MR. KEATH: Nothing need be said to prove that juvenile delinquency is a very serious problem in America these days. But when juvenile delinquents "graduate" as it were into full-fledged criminals, the problem assumes fearful proportions.

Today the Reviewing Stand welcomes the opportunity to study the signs which might indicate that the juvenile delinquent is a potential criminal.

Judge Braude, you seem interested in the disastrous results of failure to recognize delinquent tendencies. What are some of these results?

JUDGE BRAUDE: The failure to recognize these tendencies in young people

and to do something about it when we have the opportunity to do something frequently leads to what we call major or serious crimes.

What I meant in my opening statement about frequently not handling these young people properly on their first appearance in court was this: That is our first chance to find out what is behind the child's difficulties. Here we have a child brought into court by reason of some anti-social act, which we label a crime or misdemeanor, and just brush the thing off without trying to find out what underlies the difficulty which besets the child.

Some day that may result in the child getting into difficulty when it is too late to do anything about it. I don't wish to mention names but there have been several instances of cases that appeared in the press recently where these children gave evidence of abnormal behavior, either on the grade school level or in their first appearance in court. That brings up another point that I would like to mention. We ought to devise some technique in our school system whereby teachers could recognize the deviation from the norm in the behavior of children so that we could do something about it once the symptoms are detected.

MR. KEATH: Dr. Escalona, you questioned the exact definition of serious crime. Could you discuss that more fully for us?

Children's Motives Vary

DR. ESCALONA: I think what Judge Braude said is significant—trying to find out what is behind the delinquent act before the child reaches the court. One of the ways in which we have tried to find out what leads to such delinquent acts is to study children in connection with juvenile court pro-

cedure, or any other connection.

It soon becomes apparent that the same kind of social action may be performed for very different reasons by children, depending upon their previous development and the sort of situation in which they live.

It also turns out that things that children do which are anti-social in nature may be very serious from the point of view of the community, such as stealing or crimes of violence, but from a psychological point of view they may indicate that the child is exceedingly distressed and in sort of a crisis, not necessarily a child who will go into a delinquent career.

MR. KEATH: Following up your original statement, Dr. Rabinovitch, what could we do to make the community more sympathetic to the problems of the juvenile delinquent?

'Spot Signs Early'

DR. RABINOVITCH: One thing I think we can do in our own attitude and in our thinking is to get away from the idea of considering the delinquent to be a problem child. I think it is much more rational to view the delinquent as a child with a problem; if we stress the child's problem to himself, rather than the problem to the community alone, I think we are on the right track.

Now, the point I raised in my original remark was that we must develop facilities in the community to give the delinquent child the opportunity for individual study. There have been many statistical studies of delinquents and they are all of value, but they really don't meet the need. What we need is the opportunity to study each child individually, and we must understand the basis for his problem and take constructive action toward ameliorating the situation.

JUDGE BRAUDE: You said, Dr. Rabinovitch, the problem is to study the individual child. Do you mean after the child gets into trouble or before the child manifests his difficulties? Before the child presents the problem?

DR. RABINOVITCH: Certainly we should

be able in the schools and in our homes to spot signs of maladjustment as early as possible.

JUDGE BRAUDE: Can those things be spotted in advance?

DR. RABINOVITCH: I think they can. It is sometimes hard, but I think the teachers in the schools recognize that the child who is adjusting on a lower level than the others in the class, or who fails to meet the requirements for his age group, presents a problem. At home there are many children who are withdrawn, who fail to adjust to social life for their age group. These minor things certainly warrant study of the child in an effort to reach insight into his problem.

However, I must attach a rider to this. We are all very much interested in spotting maladjustments, but I think we can overdo it, too. Within the range of normal development there are numerous opportunities for variation. One must recognize the normal variations in children as well.

MR. KEATH: But what are some of the tendencies that the teacher, or the scout master, or the playground director should be on the outlook for?

DR. RABINOVITCH: I would say anti-social tendencies.

JUDGE BRAUDE: What are the specific things that give evidence that there may be something that could develop into delinquency?

Are Tendencies Inherited?

DR. RABINOVITCH: The point is that all delinquents start with small things. I think Dr. Escalona mentioned that. In the studies that have been done, we find that most children begin delinquent behavior somewhere around the age of seven or eight, is that right?

DR. ESCALONA: Yes, I think so.

JUDGE BRAUDE: Are they inherited, or do they learn those things by observing others, or do they just pick them up themselves? How do they get started?

MR. KEATH: Apparently the judge

poses a difficult question.

DR. ESCALONA: I think Judge Braude would admit, as far as minor anti-social acts are concerned, none of us has to learn them. There isn't a human being who grows up without some of them.

JUDGE BRAUDE: Do they outgrow them or suppress them?

DR. ESCALONA: We learn to deal with them in a number of ways which are acceptable.

JUDGE BRAUDE: How about the boy who finds things before others lose them? We call that stealing in the law.

DR. ESCALONA: I still call it stealing, but I want to know why.

MR. KEATH: We are back to the tendencies. You mentioned one aspect. Aren't there more of them where there might be some clue that eventually the youngster is going to wind up in front of Judge Braude or some other judge?

DR. RABINOVITCH: I think probably in most cases it is unhappiness, failure to enjoy life's experiences, a feeling of tension in the child which indicate that something is going wrong.

When Children Steal . . .

JUDGE BRAUDE: What do you say about parents who don't give their children enough spending money? Are they going to steal that money? And would you blame the parents for that?

DR. RABINOVITCH: I think in child psychiatry we are tending to get away from the attitude of blaming the parents. I think in our clinics today we try to bring both the child and the parents into the picture for treatment. The difficulties in the child may well be a reflection of difficulties in the parents. To use the word "blame" seems to me to be missing a therapeutic opportunity in the situation.

MR. KEATH: We often hear the statement that there are no juvenile delinquents; there are only delinquent parents. Do you agree with Dr. Ra-

binvitch on that trend, Dr. Escalona?

DR. ESCALONA: I agree with what Dr. Rabinovitch said, as well as with the implication of the formation. That sounds contradictory, but it isn't. I think each delinquent child behaves as he does because of what happened to him. The cause lies in his total life story and what satisfactions he gets and doesn't get out of his life, which I think is really meant by delinquent parents. But I wouldn't want to blame the parents as individuals any more than I would the child. I want to understand what causes them to fail to give the child as much happiness as he should have.

Don't Blame Parents

JUDGE BRAUDE: I see you are getting away from the old practice of blaming the parent. What about the parents who don't shower any love on their children? The children crave love and seek it elsewhere and run from the home. Would you blame the parents there? What about the parents who set the examples for their children which are improper examples? Don't they learn from the parents' behavior and from the way the parents act?

DR. RABINOVITCH: I think it is perfectly true that children get into trouble because of difficulties in their home relationship, but I don't think we get anywhere by blaming the parents. If a mother finds it difficult to give sufficient love to her child, I think she is having a problem of her own.

JUDGE BRAUDE: We are getting into semantics now. We have to find the cause of the relationship?

DR. RABINOVITCH: Certainly.

JUDGE BRAUDE: Then we do understand one another.

MR. KEATH: I was going to ask this: We have two people interested in the clinical aspects of this problem. Are your facilities adequate now to study these problems and to dramatize or publicize these difficulties to the public so you can get the cooperation we are talking about?

DR. RABINOVITCH: I am afraid our facilities are by no means adequate. I saw recently that some 40,000 children spent time in adult jails in the United States a few years ago, after minor delinquency very often. I think that indicates dramatically the lack of facilities for the study of these children.

JUDGE BRAUDE: That is one type of facility. The facilities I think Mr. Keath is talking about are the treatment facilities before the child gets into difficulty and is thrown into jail or a detention home. Are there clinical facilities in the community, on a local or state level? Is there need for this type of facility? I remember reading Aichhorn's book on prewar Vienna. He told about the child guidance clinics over there where a parent could take an emotionally disturbed child for guidance, treatment and therapy.

DR. RABINOVITCH: There are such facilities, of course, but there aren't nearly enough of them in the country. Most large centers have child guidance clinics. I think the tendency in the courts today is to have a psychologist and psychiatrist attached to the court.

What About Small Towns?

JUDGE BRAUDE: How about the smaller communities where they don't have the clinical material for this service?

DR. ESCALONA: The U.S. Public Health Service published a survey recently about the necessity for clinical facilities of this type, which indicated that we could well use at present three to four times as many child guidance clinics as there are in existence. That is largely with reference to the smaller communities which you mentioned, Judge Braude.

I think we need not only the physical apparatus which it would take to train personnel to study children in this way and to carry out treatment but we also need a team consisting of psychiatrists trained to work with children, and social workers and psychologists on a higher level of training. There

aren't nearly enough people that are competent to do that.

MR. KEATH: Would that agree with your experience, Dr. Rabinovitch?

DR. RABINOVITCH: Very definitely, except that there is a very hopeful sign and a tendency that I think speaks well for the teacher. As you know, in the past there has been a tendency for treatment to be the responsibility of the psychiatrist. We will never have enough psychiatrists to treat the number of children who need our help. There is, however, now a tendency for social case workers and for clinical psychologists to be trained in therapy. That will help the need as time goes on.

The Psychotic Personality

JUDGE BRAUDE: May I ask a question here? Suppose in one of these clinics you discover a delinquent child—by that I mean a child who hasn't committed an overt act and been brought to the attention of the courts—but is diagnosed as a psychotic personality. How would you go about treating a child like that? There has been no charge against him of any kind. What should they do with him? Throw him back into the community with the possibility that some day he might do something harmful to the community?

DR. RABINOVITCH: Of course, we could spend many hours on what constitutes a psychotic personality. There is a lot of disagreement on that subject. While you raise that point, I would like to try to link your remark with the real importance of recognizing that early life experiences must be known to understand and prevent crime in adults. You mentioned the word "psychotic personality." We may know the origin of this particular difficulty in many cases. These are children who have spent perhaps 18 months or three years, their first 18 months or three years, without ever having the experience of mothering. They have never had the stimulation that a mother's contact gives to them.

In later life we know that these children are almost doomed to failure to appreciate social conceptions, and those constitute a fair number of our seriously delinquent children. There is nothing that can be done, or very little to be done when we see them at the age of ten or twelve. What can be done in the future is to avoid institutionalizing children and to provide foster homes. We could do away with this large group of delinquent children.

DR. ESCALONA: This points up the need, I think, of still another approach to the whole problem. Dr. Rabinovitch mentioned the need for preventive work and getting acquainted with the conditions of early experiences. I think we all must recognize that our understanding of these factors is still very limited.

We will not know how to treat or prevent juvenile delinquency until we have put a great deal of research effort into understanding the personality development of children, which makes them go in a delinquent direction or any other maladjusted direction.

Patterns Crystallize Early

JUDGE BRAUDE: Then you lead me to believe something which I have been convinced of for some time. When we get these young people in the courts it is often too late to do much with, or for, many of them, especially after their behavior patterns have crystallized in what you call psychotic personality. The answer to the problem lies in the prevention you are talking about and not in the treatment that we can give many of them after we get them in court.

By that I don't mean we shouldn't make the effort, but you take much of the hope out of our job when you tell me that the crystallization takes place before the age of ten.

DR. RABINOVITCH: No, I wouldn't agree with that, Judge Braude. I think that children in their personality have a tremendous amount of fluidity and

flexibility, and that we can alter the patterns with good therapy. As Dr. Escalona pointed out, we need more research in this field, but we all have sufficient clinical experience now to know that in many cases we can alter the delinquent patterning.

Probably the worst thing possible for a child who has had behavior that we call delinquent in the community is to be treated with aggression. We have to recognize that delinquency in children is often their response to previous patterns of aggression directed against them in their lives. If we handle the case after the first delinquency with repeated aggression against them, then I think we are perpetuating and aggravating their problems.

Can Help Older Children

DR. ESCALONA: I would like also to comment on the question Judge Braude asked. I think the statement that much of the delinquent behavior is the result of unfortunate early experience does not mean that we can't help children later in life.

But it is a most expensive and laborious procedure to work with a child who has already started on a delinquent career.

I think Dr. Rabinovitch could tell us that it may take years of work. It is in the preventive aspect that we need research.

DR. RABINOVITCH: It is true that personality deviations based on early life experiences are responsible for much delinquency, but in a discussion of this sort I hope we won't overlook the fact that social conditions play a very important part, too. There is a tremendous need for recreational outlets for children. Bad housing, inadequate nutrition and the other social problems of which we are all aware play a very important part too. We mustn't overlook that.

MR. KEATH: Then the environmental conditions of home life and poor recreational facilities are the breeding grounds for tendencies that lead to

juvenile delinquency and to serious crimes?

DR. RABINOVITCH: Yes.

JUDGE BRAUDE: Isn't it true that all we have to do with many of these youngsters is to help them bridge a gap in that period of their life where their character is being formed?

Nursing Youngsters Along

I know we frequently see them in Boys' Court in serious difficulty. We nurse them along under a period of supervision and then discover after a year or so that they suddenly turn out all right. It may be that a young girl comes along in their life and that is a deflecting thing; it may be a steady job. But our job is to be able to carry them over.

There is a difference, I suppose, between functional aberrations in behavior and what you call pathological aberrations in behavior. Do you draw such a distinction, as one child being functionally bad and another pathologically bad?

DR. ESCALONA: I wonder if you mean the same thing that we have come to call a normal child reacting to a problem situation as contrasted to a child with a problem responding to a situation which in itself is not disturbing.

JUDGE BRAUDE: You put it in psychiatric language better than I could put it in layman's language. I think it is the same thing.

MR. KEATH: I wanted to ask one question, Judge Braude. Do you think our laws now are flexible enough, nationwide, to do the best thing for juvenile delinquents?

JUDGE BRAUDE: We have plenty of laws. We don't need more laws. All we need is good enforcement of the laws we have. Occasionally, in line with progress, we need some modifications of laws.

But there was a time when only the Ten Commandments, which formed the basic laws for many people, were suffi-

cient. Since that time we have made volumes and volumes of laws that haven't helped us too much. If we had good and complete administration of the laws which we already have on our books, we would have the type of enforcement that I think the public has a right to expect.

DR. RABINOVITCH: I am inclined to agree with Judge Braude on that. I think what we do need is a point of view about the delinquent child, a point of view that he is a child with a problem, and a sympathy for his problem plus the facilities to deal with his problem effectively. I think in that way we can honestly say that a great deal of adult crime would be obviated and deflected.

MR. KEATH: Do you think, Dr. Escalona, that there is a definite hope in the future for solving this very important problem?

DR. ESCALONA: Indeed I do. I think a great deal depends on the speed with which we can accomplish the aims that Dr. Rabinovitch has outlined for us. But it is not now beyond our knowledge and skill to significantly change the picture in regard to juvenile delinquency if we do what we can.

Are Children Better Now?

JUDGE BRAUDE: I would like to ask a question of Dr. Escalona and Dr. Rabinovitch: Taking the backdrop of modern life as it is today and these young children who are brought up against this backdrop, would you say the children of today are any worse than those of a decade or two ago against the backdrop of a decade or two ago?

DR. RABINOVITCH: I would say against any backdrop, they are not.

DR. ESCALONA: I agree.

MR. KEATH: Then apparently there is hope for the future if we can get some cooperation from the agencies interested in juvenile problems.

But getting back to the signs, how

can the public learn to recognize the tendencies or the signs of juvenile delinquency better? Would you have anything to say to the general public on that subject, Dr. Rabinovitch?

DR. RABINOVITCH: I would say that juvenile delinquency is really more of a legal term than it is a psychological one. It is simply a symptom of maladjustment, and it is probably no more significant than withdrawal of the child who refuses to meet the community obligations and goes contrary to them. I would say that if we learn and provide facilities for the recognition of the patterns of maladjustment in children we will handle the problem of delinquency at the same time.

Problem Can Be Solved

JUDGE BRAUDE: I would say, for my part, that if those who are responsible for the character formation in young people would do their job well, then we would have less business in the courts as far as juvenile delinquency is concerned. Parents who allow their children to stay out until unreasonable hours without making it their business to find out where they have been, or with whom they have been, or what they have been doing, have no one to blame but themselves if by reason of bad companionship and late hours those children find themselves in difficulty. That is what we can do about it.

MR. KEATH: You all emphasize, I

think, that it is extremely difficult to set up hard and fast rules for determining latent criminal tendencies. That the tendencies exist, and that finding them as early as possible will help curb delinquency and serious crime is proof that wholehearted public cooperation is needed to solve our problem. All adults should shoulder the responsibility of helping you in this field work toward greater knowledge of the causes of juvenile delinquency and better facilities with which to fight it.

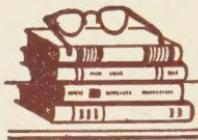
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MR. KEATH: Next week the Reviewing Stand asks *Should We Pass Laws to Curb Communism?* Our guests will be State Senator Paul Broyles of Illinois, author of the Broyles Bills which are similar to anti-Communist laws under consideration in 13 other states; J. B. Mathews, research specialist on Communism; Nathaniel L. Nathanson, professor of law at Northwestern University; and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., associate professor of history at Harvard University. We invite you to listen next week for . . . *Should We Pass Laws to Curb Communism?*



Suggested Readings



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AICHHORN, AUGUST *Wayward Youth*. New York, Viking Press, 1938.

BANAY, R. S. *Youth in Despair*. New York, Coward, 1948.

The report of a psychiatrist's study of the problem of juvenile delinquency—facts of juvenile deviations, their causes and treatment.

ELLINGTON, JOHN R. *Protecting Our Children from Criminal Careers*. New York, Prentice-Hall, 1948.

A specialized study of correctional developments in California. It reveals a rapid development and integration of its court, community and institutional facilities.

HEALY, WILLIAM and BRONNER, AUGUSTA FOX *Delinquents and Criminals, Their Making and Unmaking; Studies in Two American Cities*. New York, Macmillan, 1926.

Research based on case studies of juvenile repeated offenders in Chicago and Boston, to determine as far as possible the effectiveness of the juvenile court and correctional work and the relation between the delinquents' conditions of life and their offenses.

HEALY, WILLIAM and BRONNER, AUGUSTA F. *New Light on Delinquency and its Treatment*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1936.

A recognition of fact that major emotional disturbances are responsible for the greatest number of delinquencies. Without solving some of these emotional problems for the delinquent, the social worker can hardly hope to prevent the development of a criminal.

PORTERFIELD, AUSTIN L. *Youth in Trouble; Studies in Delinquency and Despair, with Plans for Prevention*. Fort Worth, Leo Potishman Foundation, 1946.

A clear statement of the causes of juvenile delinquency and suggestions for promoting a coordinated attack on the problem.

HARRISON, LEONARD V. *Correctional Treatment of Youth Offenders*. New York, Community Service Society of New York, 1944 (a pamphlet).

Ten histories of youth offenders given as illustrations of the chaotic nature of existing practices in procedures employed in the correctional treatment of youths convicted by criminal courts.

LANE, WINTHROP D. *What Makes Crime?* Rev. ed. New York, Public Affairs Committee, 1945. (Public Affairs Committee no. 34)

Some facts on crime, making of a criminal, treatment of criminals and a brief discussion on crime prevention.

Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 261:77-88, Jan. 49. "An Experiment in Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency." EDWIN POWERS.

A description of a highly controlled study to determine a method for preventing juvenile delinquency.

Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 261:42-54, Jan. '49. "Secondary Community Influences and Juvenile Delinquency." MARSHALL B. CLINARD.

A study of various aspects of community influences that contribute to delinquency and may often make crime attractive to the delinquent.

Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 261:9-20, Jan. '49. "Statistics of Juvenile Delinquency in the United States." EDWARD E. SCHWARTZ.

Statistics of juvenile delinquency in the United States with some analysis of the kinds of cases, handling and care.

Harper 198:385-93, May '48. "Little Donald Took an Axe; What Not to Do with Child Criminals." R. E. COWLSON.

A discussion of the causes of juvenile delinquency and methods for dealing with the juvenile delinquent before he commits a serious crime.

Journal of Criminal Law 27:545-59, 1936. "Do Problem Children Become Delinquents and Criminals?"

A case study of a group of adults, who had been problem children, that shows the correlation between juvenile delinquency and later criminal activity.

Recreation 42:454, Jan. '49. "Delinquency, Many Sided Failure." A. M. WILLIAMS.

Poses the question as to whether delinquency is not, after all, aggressive conduct on the part of youth against parents, community, church, and school because of the many ways all of us have failed them.

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7. Our Housing Problem—Building.
8. Our Housing Problem—Rent Control.
9. Can We Make Adoptions Safe?
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